To The Grave

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To The Grave

by WordsAblaze

Summary

"...I may or may not be six feet under.”

A pause, then: “You’re certain?”

Will laughs incredulously, ignoring the tear that slips from one eye. “No, Doctor Lecter, I’m not certain. But I’m lying in some sort of wooden box and finding it very difficult to breathe and it’s very cold and I can’t see anything and I—”

“Will,” Hannibal interrupts, not quite raising his voice but near enough, “I apologise for doubting you."

Notes

when i tell you i've been WAITING for this one !!

day 25 prompts used: buried alive

russian translation now kindly available here <3

See the end of the work for more notes

“Knew I shouldn’t have—ow!” Will groans as something hits his head.

Or rather, as his head crashes into something when he attempts to shake off his groggy disorientation. He opens his eyes to see what he’s walked into, only to find that neither can he see and nor is he walking.

“What—?” he mutters, blinking slowly several times, only to come up just as unsuccessful in dispelling the darkness each time. “Okay…” Will swallows, forcing himself not to jump to conclusions and moving to rub his eyes, but his hand knocks into the same something that his head had.

His eyes widen as he finds *both* hands unable to move very far, stopped by what feels like wood every time he tries to push them forwards. But not exactly *forwards* because, as alertness returns to him, he realises he’s lying on his back, and his hands are struggling to move *upwards* .

“Okay, okay, think…” Will tells himself, and focuses on his feet. Finding that they too can’t move more than a couple of inches upwards before being met with whatever it is above him, he curses, running the pad of his thumb across each of his fingers in turn to stop himself panicking.

It doesn’t work.

His breathing quickens without his permission, and he throws his head upwards in frustration. Of course, that only leaves him with a headache, and he winces as his head falls back down onto the cold, damp surface below him. He does learn that whatever it is above him is made of wood, and is fixed in place, clearly designed to keep him trapped. The main question, then, is *where* he’s trapped.

“Where was I before…?” Will asks himself, wincing when the sound of his voice bounces in the air around him, a little too thickly to count as an echo. Choosing not to dwell on the revelation that the space around him must be considerably limited, Will sifts through his memories of the crime scene, of the team splitting up, of making his way to—

Oh.

Will takes a deep, shaky breath, coughing slightly at the prickle of dust in his throat. He’d been trying to find evidence for his theory at the *cemetery* . Clenching his hands into fists, he swallows down the immediately blinding wave of hopelessness, now confident in identifying the darkness around him as the inside of a coffin.

He doesn’t remember exactly what, if anything, he’d found, but he does remember being only a few seconds away from calling the others to relay… something. The memory has him gasping in realisation, and he wriggles his arms to reach the edge of his jacket, unzipping his pockets and almost shouting in joy when he feels the familiar shape of his phone.

“Not very thorough, are you?” he asks the long gone graveyard caretaker, but groans in frustration as he realises he can’t lift his head enough to see the phone screen.

He only has three numbers on speed dial—Beverly, because she’d added herself when he’d given the excuse of not knowing her number as a reason not to call; Hannibal, because Will has needed to cancel his appointments in a rush on more than one occasion; and Martha, his closest neighbour, because his phone had suggesting adding her due to how frequently he asks her to watch the dogs—so he hopes he’s selecting the right number as he presses the call button.

“Will?” Hannibal asks.

Not the right number; he’d been hoping for Beverly and her ability to commandeer FBI resources.

“Doctor Lecter. Sorry, I—wrong number,” Will mumbles.

“Are you alright, Will?” Hannibal asks, apparently ignoring the potential dismissal, “You disappeared rather quickly with very little explanation.”

Right. Hannibal had been at the crime scene too. Will shrugs instinctively, then chides himself for being so situationally unaware. “I’m fine,” he lies.

“Forgive me for being impolite, but you don’t *sound* fine.”

Will laughs bitterly and closes his eyes, focusing on his breathing and the way his lungs inexplicably seem to be struggling more than they had been mere minutes ago. He’s pulled out of his confusion by Hannibal’s voice: “Will? Are you hurt?”

“No,” Will replies, “I’m not—I’m *fine* . Really. I’m just… trapped?”

Hannibal inhales sharply, and Will winces as the sound cuts through the stale air. “Could you elaborate, Will?”

As much as Will wants to hang up and try getting through to Beverly again, the alarms in his head are reminding him that he has no idea how much time has passed, and there’s no guarantee that Beverly isn’t asleep, or that his phone isn’t close to running out of charge. With a sigh, he decides to try and make the best of the situation.

“I’m in a coffin,” he admits slowly, “and I may or may not be six feet under.”

A pause, then: “You’re certain?”

Will laughs incredulously, ignoring the tear that slips from one eye. “No, Doctor Lecter, I’m not *certain* . But I’m lying in some sort of wooden box and finding it very difficult to breathe and it’s very cold and I can’t see *anything* and I—”

“Will,” Hannibal interrupts, not quite raising his voice but near enough, “I apologise for doubting you, especially about something... of this nature. Please forgive me. Do you know where you’ve been buried?”

Will almost sobs at the question, but he quells the growing stab of fear and exhales heavily, rattling off the address. Hannibal hums in acknowledgement and the sound of rustling reaches through the phone. For a moment, Will thinks—panics—that he's going to hang up, but then he clears his throat. "That cemetery is not far from my current location. I'll remain on the phone as I make my way there, and I would like for you to keep talking until I reach you."

"I… don't remember what I found," Will admits, but Hannibal clicks his tongue.

"No, Will, I'm not asking for information regarding the case. I just need you to talk. You may even remind me how to construct the perfect fishing lure, if you wish."

"Why—why would you want to hear about something like that?" Will asks, struggling to hear anything over the pounding of his heart. His head feels strange, as if someone has filled it with helium and it's struggling to remain grounded, and he can't feel his toes.

The sound of a car engine warming up travels through the phone before Hannibal replies. "I find myself inexplicably intrigued by anything you're willing to share," he says, and, despite the ringing in Will's ears, he can hear the sincerity in Hannibal's voice.

"How long can humans breathe without fresh air?" Will asks instead, making a note to explore just how far he can talk Hannibal's ears off about fishing another time.

One very long moment later, Hannibal sighs. "I'm afraid there's no simple answer to that. I would need to know the dimensions of… the space you have, along with how much time has passed since you were placed there. I would advise against dwelling on such questions, Will. I am not far from you."

Will nods, but punches the coffin lid in frustration anyway. He regrets that a moment later, when dirt seeps in through the panels. He cries out at the sensation, instinctively moving to brush the dirt away from his face, but his hands collide with the wood again and not only allow more dirt to rain over him, into his mouth this time, but cause him to drop the phone.

He can hear Hannibal's voice as he coughs and splutters, but, no matter how much he wriggles his fingers, he can't seem to find his phone again. "Doctor Lecter?" he asks, his voice weak even to his own ears.

"Will. Can you hear me?" Hannibal asks, and Will realises the device has been knocked further away from him, towards his feet. He's immensely grateful his struggling hadn't ended the call, because he'd have had no way to reconnect it, and that would have meant he'd be alone when—

"Listen to me," Hannibal all but orders, "focus on my voice. I know where you are, and I promise I will find you in time. Do *not* panic."

"I'm not panicking," he lies.

Hannibal hums, clearly unconvinced, and mutters darkly under his breath. "Doctor Lecter?" Will asks, unfamiliar with the other man sounding quite so disheartened.

"I apologise, Will. A careless driver has forced me to take an early turn, but it should only be a short detour," Hannibal explains.

Will exhales unsteadily. "Right. Right. What–what time is it?"

"Around eight in the evening, Will."

Eight.

Something frantic rises in his throat again, and Will loses a moment to the whiteness of his eyes being squeezed tightly shut as he bites his tongue to stifle the instinctive sob that tries to push through. He'd left for the cemetery just after lunch so, assuming it hadn't taken long to find what he was looking for, he's been under the ground for around half a dozen hours: it doesn't take a mathematician to conclude his odds are low.

"Will? Are you still with me?" Hannibal asks urgently.

Swallowing the lump of nausea in his throat, Will nods, mostly to himself. "Still here," he confirms. "Sorry, I…"

"It's alright," Hannibal murmurs, his voice almost soft despite the static of the phone, "I understand this is unpleasant for you. I assure you I will be there soon."

“You promise?” Will finds himself asking, knowing that he’ll be embarrassed to have so childishly done so as soon as he doesn’t feel so horribly weightless.

Hannibal, to his credit, doesn’t mock him for his childish question. “I promise, Will. I swear to you that I will not let anything happen to you.”

An odd warmth blooms behind Will’s ribs, not exactly painful but a little uncomfortable, and he holds his breath to stop it from escaping, to relish in the way it comfortingly travels through his bones, to force it to stay where it is because it feels like an anchor and he’s in desperate need of one.

“I need you to breathe, Will,” Hannibal tells him firmly, so he does. Inhale. Exhale. Repeat. “Very good. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome?” he replies, confused. He’s abruptly exhausted, and even the acts of inhaling and exhaling require an exorbitant amount of energy. He clings to that anchor of warmth behind his ribs, and turns his head to one side. “I’m… Hannibal, I’m really, really tired.”

A car door opens and closes before Hannibal hums. “I know. You must stay awake a little longer, however. Can you do that for me, Will?”

“I don’t know,” Will mumbles honestly, hoping Hannibal won’t be too disappointed in him.

“I am not disappointed in you,” Hannibal says softly, kinder than Will had thought human voices could ever sound, and it’s unclear whether his thoughts are now verbalising themselves or his unofficial psychiatrist just knows him *that* well.

“I could never be disappointed in you. In fact, I am incredibly impressed by you,” Hannibal adds, still just as softly. The former option it is, Will concludes; clearly Hannibal doesn’t know him even nearly well enough if someone like *him* is impressed with someone like *Will*.

Regardless, the traitorous anchor of warmth behind his ribs *preens* at the words, and Will finds it just a little easier to breathe. He channels all of his energy into inhaling and exhaling as footsteps float through the phone, interspersed with the crunch of leaves and the scraping of metal. The noises don’t make sense, but nothing much does, so Will doesn't question them, not until there’s a pause.

“Will?” Hannibal asks.

“Still… still here,” Will replies, shivering. He can’t feel his hands, so he can’t centre himself by digging his nails into his palms, and he feels entirely off-balance.

“Good. I know exactly where you are, Will. It shouldn’t take me too long to dig you out but I need you to pay attention and tell me when you hear me.”

Will frowns. “I *can* hear you?”

A small chuckle, then: “I’m glad to hear that. I apologise, I should have been more specific: I need you to tell me when you can hear me *above you* rather than through the phone.”

Will blinks. A part of him hadn’t *actually* expected Hannibal to come all the way to the cemetery. He couldn’t even explain why—he’ll later say as much to Hannibal in a makeshift therapy session—but he’s more than happy to have been proven wrong and he bizarrely—again, they’ll later discuss why it isn’t bizarre at all—finds himself *smiling.*

“You came,” Will breathes.

He must have caught Hannibal off guard, because there are several extended moments of silence before he replies. “Of course, Will. You called.”

And he hadn’t even *meant* to. He’s never been so happy to have dialled the wrong number, and he pointedly bites his tongue so he doesn’t verbalise his mistake and give Hannibal any excuse to change his mind about helping him. He shifts his focus back to breathing manually, his lungs having reached the point of rattling, and keeps his eyes trained on the darkness above him.

Hannibal is definitely saying *something* , but the words melt into each other and the ringing in Will’s ears is too loud for him to distinguish one sentence from another. He knows he’s probably imagining the scuttling sensation across his knees, but he can’t stand it, and he jerks his legs upwards with a quiet cry of alarm when it intensifies.

“Hann—i—bal?” he manages, his voice bordering on a whine.

But the voice has stopped.

“No,” Will breathes, not even sure if he’s making a sound at all, “no, no, *please* . Please—you said— *no* , *please* —I can’t—”

He can't *blame* Hannibal for giving up when that generally seems to be the natural response to his existence, but it feels as though the anchor is being carelessly yanked out from behind his lungs, tearing through bone and muscle alike, and Will's lungs abruptly stop functioning, a sharp vacuum of pain taking their place.

"You… you prom— *ised* ," Will thinks he shouts, but a strangled sob forces itself past his teeth and the darkness blurs around him before he can be sure.

His chest rises and falls frantically as he struggles to keep ahold of the anchor, cold creeping up into his veins as it slips away from him, freezing each of his cells in turn. "I ca—can't—" he tries, but he's not even sure *what* he can't, or why he was even trying to.

The air around him seems to have run out of oxygen, and Will can feel tears burn a path over his temples as he lashes out, hoping his limbs are still there. They must be, because soil cascades over him, and he presses his lips together to keep himself from choking on it because he's *supposed* to be paying attention, but he can feel that same scuttling over every inch of what must be his body, and he just *can't*—

"Will!"

Hannibal?

"I'm right here, Will. Can you hear me?"

Will just groans, refusing to open his mouth and let the darkness in. His response must suffice, because he can hear a sigh of relief above him.

"Close your eyes for me, Will," Hannibal says; the anchor of warmth has returned to its position nestled behind his ribs, and Will thinks he would do just about *anything* to keep it there, so closing his eyes is no trouble at all.

As soon as he squeezes them shut, something metallic thuds above him, and it feels as though the earth itself shudders. He whimpers, and there's a beat of silence before it resumes, more dirt falling across his eyelids, between his fingers, down his neck. Despite his lungs screaming when he refuses to inhale any of it, Will forces himself to remain still, clinging to that fiercely burning anchor.

The darkness seems to weaken behind his eyelids, and Will registers the hands on his face at the same time his lungs jump at the opportunity to claim fresh oxygen. He chokes on soil as he gasps, and there are immediately hands guiding him upright, forcing him to spit the earth out and replace it with air.

"I've got you, Will," someone whispers, and he almost sobs again, because nobody has ever *really* wanted to have him, and he can't imagine that changing when he's in such a pitiful state.

"I made you a promise, didn't I?" the same someone asks, and Will wants to argue that that has historically *never* made a difference, but he's too busy coughing, his throat having morphed into sandpaper somewhere along the way.

“You’re okay, Will.” And, this time, he knows the *someone* is *Hannibal* , and he unceremoniously sobs at that realisation, blinking his eyes open and meeting Hannibal’s soft gaze. “There you are.”

Will’s vision blurs but, before he can reach up to rub his eyes, Hannibal’s hands are there, cupping either side of his face with twin bursts of warmth, thumbs gently brushing aside both dirt and tears. Shivering, Will leans forwards, further into Hannibal’s touch, further still into his inviting embrace, focusing on inhaling and exhaling as arms wrap around his shoulders, their grip tightening just enough to stop his mind wandering.

“You’re here,” Will breathes eventually.

“For you, always,” Hannibal replies, pulling them apart just enough for Will to see the sincerity in his eyes. He can also see the soil lodged in Hannibal’s hair, the beads of sweat on his forehead, and the redness of exertion on his cheeks; he's decidedly, uncharacteristically *dishevelled* and it's quite possibly one of the most beautiful things Will has ever seen.

He coughs, and the moment shatters, Hannibal’s reassaurence hardening into concern. Will’s emotions must be particularly evident on his face, because Hannibal smiles, and leans forwards so their foreheads are pressed together. “It’s imperative we get some warmth back into you, Will. I promise the visit to the hospital will be brief, but it can’t be avoided entirely.”

Will doesn’t want to go to a hospital. He wants to stay here, where he can call someone and they’ll come for him, where all he has to do is *try* for someone to be proud of him, where the anchor of warmth inside him isn’t being constantly doused by doubt and disappointment.

“I’ll stay with you the whole time, Will,” Hannibal says, once again pulling back.

“Promise?” Will asks, because the world no longer makes enough sense for him to string together a sentence.

“I promise,” Hannibal replies, his voice doing that impossibly soft thing just like before. Will isn’t sure he deserves such softness, but the jagged fog in his head leaves him uncertain how he’s supposed to fight it, so he simply accepts it with a small nod.

He can’t feel his legs, and his knees buckle as soon as he puts his weight on them, but Hannibal doesn’t seem to mind—it make no sense, the way his weakness is simply *allowed*—and he finds himself more or less horizontal again before he can blink, nestled against a warm chest, his head falling into place in the crook of a warm neck.

“Stay with me, now,” Hannibal whispers, sending a shiver through his bones.

“Always,” Will mumbles, hoping that’s the right answer.

End Notes

i could've ended this with a six-feet-deep cliffhanger so. you're welcome.

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